SECOORA’s Regional Coastal Ocean Observing System

Providing Critical Marine Weather Data and Information Products for the Marine Community

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1.0 Introduction

The Southeast Coastal Ocean Observing Regional Association (SECOORA) is implementing a cohesive Regional Coastal Ocean Observing System (RCOOS) for the southeast US as a regional component of the US Integrated Ocean Observing System (US IOOS). The Southeast (SE) coastal region is vulnerable to hurricanes, potential impacts from oil spills, and climate change because of low land elevations, coral and other critical habitats, and our location at the transition of tropical to subtropical latitudes.

SECOORA has established a robust data management subsystem that integrates data from various coastal ocean and estuarine observing and monitoring programs and delivers marine weather and other information products via SECOORA’s website and data portal (http://secoora.org/maps).

2.0 SECOORA Regional Coastal Ocean Observing System

SECOORA is one of 11 Regional Associations established nationwide through the Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS®). The SECOORA region (Fig. 1) encompasses four states spanning the coastal ocean from North Carolina to the west coast of Florida. The SECOORA region is linked through large-scale circulation patterns. The western boundary current (WBC) of the North Atlantic, comprised of the Loop Current/Florida Current/Gulf Stream system (Fig. 2), interacts strongly with coastal waters, intimately coupling the SECOORA region to global circulation patterns. Rivers and estuaries in the SE connect the watersheds of the southeastern Appalachian mountains to the coastal waters. These varied riverine and estuarine systems, from broad lagoons to dendritic marsh systems with large tidal patterns, are also influenced by shelf processes and establish a strong connectivity between the land and the sea. Strong atmospheric frontal passages and surface waves produced by tropical storms impact ocean circulation in the Gulf and eastern seaboard, and induce upwelling/downwelling regimes in the SECOORA footprint that affect the ecosystem in profound ways. Thus, implementing an RCOOS to acquire marine atmospheric and oceanographic observations in SECOORA that are linked to robust predictive models and decision-making tools is essential to improving forecasting of severe weather events and marine conditions.

SECOORA is building an RCOOS that leverages, integrates and augments existing observational, modeling, data management, education and scientific assets within the region. SECOORA is creating customized products to address these thematic areas: Marine Operations; Coastal Hazards; Ecosystems; Water Quality; Living Marine Resources; and Climate Change.

3.0 SECOORA RCOOS Components

3.1 Observing Subsystem

The observing subsystem provides the basis for the RCOOS by supporting and integrating existing assets and observations specific to the development of products addressing four SECOORA thematic areas. The observing subsystem consists of a suite of coastal and offshore moored platforms, autonomous underwater gliders, satellite data receivers and high frequency radar (HFR) surface current installations. Table 1 provides observing system assets being currently funded by SECOORA and the various stakeholders. Each observing system collects and provides near real-time and information products to various end users and stakeholders.

In-situ Moored and Coastal Stations

- University of South Florida Coastal Ocean Monitoring and Prediction System (COMPIS)
- University of North Carolina Wilmington Coastal Ocean Research and Monitoring Program (CORMP)
- University of Georgia – Grey’s Reef National Marine Sanctuary (GRMNS)

Variables measured:
- Meteorological: Air temperature, Relative humidity, Barometric pressure, Wind Speed and Direction, Short- and Long-Wave radiation
- Oceanographic: In-water velocity and temperature, salinity, water level and waves, Dissolved oxygen, Dissolved inorganic carbon

Table 1. SECOORA Observing Subsystem Activities

3.2 Multi-scale Multi-Resolution Modeling Subsystem

SECOORA follows an optimal approach to advance the implementation of SECOORA models from sub-regional to regional scales, including coupled atmosphere, surface wave, water quality, habitat and ocean circulation models. Model output and related products are either served via the SECOORA web site or member web sites. Table 2 provides the models that are currently supported by SECOORA.

Regional Ocean Circulation Model
- North Carolina State University

Shallow Water Modeling
- University of Florida and North Carolina State University

Beach Water Quality Modeling
- University of South Carolina

Fisheries Habitat Modeling
- National Fish and Wildlife Service

Table 2. SECOORA Modeling Subsystem Activities

3.3 Data Management Subsystem

SECOORA has established a robust data management and communications infrastructure, and has implemented the Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS®) Data Management and Communications (DMAC) recommended standards and technologies that promote interoperability, aggregation, access, visualization, utilization, archival and dissemination of coastal ocean data and information products in a timely manner to stakeholders via the SECOORA data and information portal and web services. The data management activities that are carried out by the University of North Carolina and the University of South Carolina are provided in Table 3.

University of South Carolina - Provide SECOORA’s data management infrastructure and tools
- Maintain SECOORA’s data and information portal
- Identify and integrate new and existing SECOORA data portal service and provide support to data providers and end users

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill - Advance IOOS Parameter Vocabulary

Table 3. SECOORA Data Management Subsystem Activities

4.0 Marine Weather Data and Information Products

SECOORA, in collaboration with stakeholders such as National Weather Service (NWS) Weather Forecast Office (WFOs), researchers, coastal zone and emergency managers, public health officials, and commercial entities has established US IOOS recommended standards-based data management technologies to facilitate efficient ways to integrate data from a variety of coastal ocean and estuarine observing and monitoring programs.

Marine weather and other information products are delivered via the SECOORA web site and data portal (http://secoora.org/maps). For example, the Marine Weather Portal (http://secoora.org/data/marineweatherportal) application provides standardized, integrated marine weather information for coastal North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas. Development of the marine weather application was led by researchers at the University of North Carolina – Wilmington, University of South Carolina, University of South Florida and Second Creek Consulting in partnership with WFOs in the southeast US including weather forecasters, data managers and stakeholders.

The WFOs of Brunswick, TX, Corpus Christi, TX and Wilmington are using the Marine Weather Portal and have customized the website to display marine weather data for their weather forecast regions.

The SECOORA DMAC is supporting the development of information products for the following thematic areas: Marine Operations; Coastal Hazards; Ecosystems; Water Quality; and Living Marine Resources.

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